

Final Notes February 12, 1998

DECISION PROCESS COORDINATING GROUP
MEETING NOTES

January 20, 1998, 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES
PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Greeting and Introductions.

The January 20 meeting of the Decision Process Coordinating Group, held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by NMFS consultant Ed Sheets. The agenda for the January 20 meeting and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B. The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items.

I. Greetings and Introductions.

Sheets welcomed everyone to the meeting, led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. These formalities concluded, Sheets moved on to the first substantive agenda item for today's meeting.

II. Status Report on the PATH Analysis.

PATH coordinator Dave Marmorek distributed enclosure C, an updated PATH schedule and work plan dated January 12, 1998. I wanted to talk to you about this schedule today, he began, as well as about the form in which our results will be presented. On the latter point, he said, as you'll recall from our discussions at previous meetings, we agreed to produce a sort of mock report as a way to generate feedback on the best way to present our results. This exercise takes on added importance, because PATH has been asked to present preliminary results from its spring/summer further analysis in February, to both the Implementation Team and the Executive Committee.

As most of you are aware, since October, PATH has been working on a preliminary analysis of a subset of options in the context of spring/summer chinook, Marmorek continued. He distributed Enclosure D, the mock report referenced above, which shows some hypothetical results from the analysis of a trio of fictitious management actions: X-Ray, Yodel and Zap. Basically what we have here, Marmorek explained, it is a set of management actions, a set of uncertain states of nature, and a set of outcomes. What we're looking for, of course, is how well a given management action does in meeting the various survival and recovery standards over time -- what percentage of the time we can expect a given stock to survive at a rate above that identified threshold survival level, under a particular management action.

Marmorek went through Enclosure D in some detail, attempting to explain how the above-referenced "uncertain states of nature" affect the performance standards currently under consideration by PATH, as well as what proportion of the time those standards might be expected to be met. In this particular case, Marmorek said, for the set of hypothetical management actions we're calling X-Ray, Yodel and Zap, none of them appear to do a particularly good job of meeting the performance standard -- at best, only 40%-42% of the possible futures result in the survival standard being met over a 24-year period.

The basic idea behind the various facets of this analysis, he continued, is to tease apart the relative influence of different uncertainties in affecting which decision comes out best. That will then allow us to do a couple of things -- it will show us where to focus our research, monitoring and experimental management efforts in order to resolve key uncertainties in the future; it will also tell us something about how sensitive our results are to the weighting we apply to some of these uncertainties, Marmorek explained. For example, if you have good evidence that the climate is cyclical, and that, based on your analysis, it is twice as likely to be cyclical than random, then you would assign a 66% probability to the cyclical climate hypothesis, and a 33% probability to the random climate hypothesis, and see what that does to your results. All of this helps to frame the discussion of how strong the evidence has to be to tilt the decision one way or another, he said.

So under this decision tree (on page one of Enclosure D), the only uncertainty left is transportation assumptions? asked Phil Thor of BPA. That's correct, Marmorek replied. What about other variables, such as habitat and harvest? Sheets asked. We're treating habitat as an uncertainty in terms of how the productivity of different stocks might change given current habitat management actions, but given a stronger habitat conservation protection action, Marmorek replied.

Marmorek went on to detail some of the passage and non-passage uncertainties PATH is factoring into its analysis, then described the various sensitivity analyses the PATH results will undergo. Any other major comments? he asked. When you make your presentation to the IT and EC, you should reiterate that the goal of this mock exercise is to show how the information might be presented, not to tell the decision-makers what decision to make, said Lynne Krasnow of NMFS -- otherwise, your audience is going to be sitting there saying, "When are you going to get to the part where you tell me which alternative is best?" Good point, Marmorek agreed.

While it's probably premature to discuss actual results from PATH's spring/summer chinook analysis today, Marmorek said that PATH's analysis will show, probably for the first time, the quantitative effects of different assumptions in terms of meeting the various recovery and survival standards. Historically, part of the problem with this type of analysis has been the fact that different groups have gone off and done their analyses independently, then presented them independently; as a result, NMFS has often been faced with a situation where one group says "turn left," and the other group says "turn right," Marmorek said. PATH is attempting to link all of the various facets of this analysis together, and I think that's a valuable step forward. However, I should probably reiterate that what will ultimately emerge from the PATH analysis is not going to be a single clear recommendation -- "do this," Marmorek said. If the evidence was that clear, you wouldn't need PATH at all.

Moving on to PATH's 1997-'98 work plan and current schedule, Marmorek said PATH expects

to deliver the third draft of its preliminary spring/summer chinook decision analysis report for Scientific Review Panel review by next week. At the last DPCG meeting, we talked about the fourth alternative for analysis, said Sheets -- is that fourth alternative included in this preliminary decision analysis report? No, Marmorek replied -- that will be the next thing we do.

Currently, the key question the PATH planning group is cogitating on is, how can we make enough progress on fall chinook so that, by the end of August, we have an analysis which looks at both spring/summer chinook and fall chinook, Marmorek said. To what degree can we put the spring/summer chinook analysis on the back burner, once we complete the John Day analyses, in order to focus all of our efforts on making major progress on the fall chinook analysis? The direction we received at the most recent IT meeting was clearly to leave spring/summer chinook as soon as possible and make progress on fall chinook, Marmorek said, and that's what we're going to try to do. PATH also hopes to be able to make progress on its steelhead analysis at the same time it is working on its fall chinook analysis; however, the steelhead analysis will be limited by the lesser amount of available data. In fact, Marmorek said, the steelhead analysis will likely be restricted to inferences drawn from the spring/summer chinook analysis -- at least, that is all we're likely to achieve by this fall.

Moving on, Marmorek touched on the experimental management workshop PATH hopes to hold in March 1998. The idea behind this workshop is to consider the question of to what degree various types of experimental management might help to resolve some of the uncertainties that are emerging through the PATH process, and how long that might take, he said. The PATH planning group is starting to discuss what would be involved in organizing such a workshop, as well as the most efficient way to fit it into PATH's very tight schedule. It's possible that the timing of the workshop might slip back into the fall, he said.

The discussion turned to how difficult and time-consuming it is likely to be for PATH to analyze additional alternatives; ultimately, Sheets said this discussion is probably a month or two premature. Basically, he said, the assumption I was left with was that if the preliminary analysis for spring/summer chinook shows that multiple alternatives will exceed the performance standards, that would lead us in one correction, although from what I heard, it sounds as though this is an extremely unlikely outcome. The other outcome is that the preliminary analysis will show very few alternatives that result in an exceedence of the performance measures the various parties in the region are interested in, Sheets said. If that does in fact prove to be the case, at least it will help us prioritize the alternatives.

In a nutshell, in terms of PATH's schedule, what we are trying to do it is to generate something useful, but incomplete, by the fall of 1998, Marmorek said. After that, we will try to fill in the holes. Is there consensus that the DPCG might want to reconvene in late February or early March to review the preliminary results for spring/summer chinook, and to try to develop some guidance for the IT's effort to prioritize where PATH needs to go from here? Sheets asked. After some minutes of discussion, it was agreed that it would probably be most efficient to have this discussion at the February 5 IT meeting.

III. Review of Comments on the Draft Recommendation Paper.

Sheets distributed Enclosure E -- the most recent draft (dated January 20, 1998) of the "Working

Draft Recommendations from the Decision Process Coordinating Group on a Process for Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Restoration Decisions.” This draft includes all of the comments received to date – from the Corps, Dave Marmorek, Tom Cooney and from the last DPCG meeting, Sheets explained. The good news is that none of these comments were diametrically opposed to one another, or even strongly inconsistent. However, there are probably a couple of key things that should be flagged for your attention, he said.

At the bottom of Page 2, Sheets touched on the various highlighted changes in this paragraph; after a brief discussion, it was agreed to change the second sentence to read “The analysis for this decision should consider the effects of hydrosystem actions on ESA species in the context of possible changes in habitat, hatchery practices and harvest regulations.”

Sheets also drew the DPCG’s attention to the numerous changes underlined in the “Decision Analysis” section on page 3 of Enclosure E, saying that they had been made in response to suggestions captured in the November DPCG meeting minutes. He asked the other DPCG members to review these changes with care, to ensure that the commenters’ viewpoints have been accurately captured.

Under the “Alternatives” section on pp. 3-4 of this document, the final sentence was revised to read, “Based on the results of the analysis of all the species, the Group will submit additional alternatives for further analysis, including additional flow augmentation for alternatives that do not meet the biological standards.”

The DPCG continued on through the document. On page 7, Under “Develop the Appropriate Decision Criteria and Considerations,” said Sheets, I was a little confused about sockeye and lamprey, I wrote that the “relative risks to sockeye and lamprey will be assessed by qualitative comparison with other species groups.” Is that right? He asked.

So far, PATH is not planning to do any sort of lamprey analysis, Marmorek replied, so I would prefer not to put it in here. As far as sockeye go, I would prefer to say something like, “We assume that what’s good for spring/summer chinook is good for sockeye.” In managing expectations, it would probably be best to spell out the fact that the relative risk to sockeye will be assessed by cursory quantitative comparison – something laden with caveats. It may be best to address lamprey under the section on Page 14, “Other Biological Impacts,” Sheets suggested. One meeting participant said he will talk to Marv Yoshinaka about what he plans to do about lamprey and report back to the group at its next meeting.

It was agreed that, when he makes his presentation to the IT and EC, Sheets will raise the question articulated in Point 6 under “Next Steps,” and ask whether the policymakers feel this should be done, and if so, by whom. It was further agreed to encourage more direct participation in the DPCG process by the DREW membership, if possible.

After some minutes of further discussion, it was agreed that, once Sheets incorporates the comments made at today's meeting, this document will be considered final.

IV. Review of Mainstem Alternatives Developed by NMFS.

Sheets distributed Enclosure F, a letter from Will Stelle to Steve Crow of the Council staff,

dated December 18, 1997, regarding the configuration and operations alternatives under consideration in the PATH process. The enclosure also includes a list of mainstem alternatives developed by NMFS, some of which are similar to alternatives that are currently under analysis; some quite different, Sheets explained.

My understanding is that this letter is partially the result of some work that has been carried out under the Three Sovereigns process, he continued. Obviously a lot of work has gone into this; there is more work that needs to be done. What I might propose is that this could become the list that is in our paper, said Sheets, with the important caveat that it may not be possible to do detailed biological analysis of all of these alternatives, at least until we've seen some results from PATH and figured out how we want to prioritize the next round of work. Does that make sense? Sheets asked. After some minutes of discussion, no objections were raised to this course of action, although Thor recommended that Alternative 10 on Stelle's list be combined with Alternatives 1, 2 and 9.

Both NMFS and CRITFC have expressed interest in looking at the possibility of additional flow augmentation, Sheets said. Is there anyone who has a strong objection to this idea, and who feels that it should not be a priority for analysis? SCT co-chair Bill Hevlin made the point that, at the last SCT meeting, an additional \$300,000 had been allocated to allow the Bureau of Reclamation to complete its analysis of the cost and potential availability of additional flow augmentation water in the Upper Snake. Is it fair to say that, first from PATH's standpoint, there are at least some alternatives that do not meet all of the recovery and survival standards, and second, that, using all of your models, additional flow augmentation will have some benefit? Asked Sheets. And if that is in fact the case, does that mean this is an alternative that PATH will need to look at?

Strategically, the smart thing to do is to look at alternatives that bound the response first, Marmorek replied. In other words, if you're going to do a flow augmentation scenario, do something large, so that you really learn something from it. The question is, what is the relative priority of that analysis compared to, say, fall chinook?

Moving on, Sheets drew the DPCG's attention to the letter from Norm Semanko of Rosholt, Robertson and Tucker, dated January 9 (attached as Enclosure G). The group spent a few minutes going through its contents; ultimately, it was agreed that an analysis of the economic effects of additional flow augmentation would be included in the above-mentioned analysis of additional flow augmentation.

After some minutes of further discussion, Sheets suggested that the DPCG resume the discussion of this issue at its next meeting, after PATH makes its presentation on preliminary spring/summer chinook results on February 12. At that point, he said, we can discuss the question of the relative priority of this analysis compared to the fall chinook and steelhead analyses. Obviously we have a tremendous workload, said Marmorek -- we will need to have some discussion, when we make our presentation to IT, about how that workload needs to be prioritized. A few minutes of additional discussion yielded no DPCG disagreement with Sheets' suggested course of action.

V. Discussion of Alternatives to Decision Analysis.

This item was not discussed at today's meeting.

VI. Review of Harza Material on Modifying Flow Augmentation.

The Corps' Greg Graham reviewed Enclosure H, a document titled "Biological Benefit and Cost Optimization Review." This handout was originally presented in Spokane in November, Graham explained; Harza's charge was to develop a plan to try to optimize cost and biological benefit. It includes capital improvements at all eight mainstem projects, as well as some operational changes.

The latter area is where I wanted to focus today, Graham continued. If you look at the last page of the handout, there is a section headed "Restructuring Flow Augmentation." There are two components here, spring and summer flow augmentation. In the spring, Harza suggests significantly reducing flow augmentation requirements, Graham said. For the summer period, Harza is recommending that we stick with the augmentation levels recommended in the BiOp. The rationale behind what they're proposing is that the benefits accruing to spring flow augmentation are marginal at best, based on their analysis.

The point I want to make is that, basically, with this feasibility study, we've opened up the can of worms that is flow augmentation, Graham said. The Corps is doing an EIS; in that process, we have to consider all sides of the flow augmentation issue. If this is another side, then we need to fold it into the mix. That means, first, that PATH needs to analyze it or, if it is determined that this is not a reasonable alternative, someone needs to document why. I feel we need to do that, just to cover the flow augmentation issue thoroughly, he said. I don't want to say yes or no to what's in this Harza review, Graham said; I simply wanted you to be aware that this is another option that has been suggested we include in the Feasibility Study.

The only thing I would add is that I'm not sure this needs to be analyzed as a separate option, said Tom Cooney – I think reduced flow augmentation is already being looked at as a component of the full transportation alternative. And we will revisit the entire question of priorities for additional analysis once we hear PATH's report on February 12, said Sheets.

VII. Next DPCG Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the Decision Process Coordinating Group was set for Wednesday, March 4 from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at NMFS's Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.